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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how 402 randomly selected sociology departments in colleges and universities in the United States are attempting to cope with problems in higher education. A survey instrument was developed in which questions focused on two basic issues: (1) how have problems such as enrollment declines, shifting academic interests among students, and shrinking revenues been defined and approached? and (2) what strategies are being employed to confront and cope with these and other problems? Specific questions included "Has your sociology department sought to make undergraduate courses more relevant to employment?" "To what extent have your undergraduate students become more vocationally oriented?" "Have declining enrollments in sociology courses corresponded with increasing enrollments in vocational programs?" and "Has the sociology faculty changed the standards of work demanded of students?" Findings indicated that sociology departments have responded to problems in two general ways--by vocationalizing the curriculum (adding courses in social work and applied sociology, hiring vocationally-oriented faculty, and making courses relevant to employment) and by adding vocational supplements to academic curricula (developing career information packets for prospective students, creating a career information center, and combining career advising with academic counseling). The author arrives at the conclusion that sociology departments will serve students best if they teach sociology as a humanistic, liberating discipline. At the same time, instructors should supplement the curriculum in ways that meet the career concerns of students. (DB)

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COPING WITH VOCATIONALISM:

CAREERISM VS. HUMANISM IN THE

UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

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A paper prepared for presentation at the annual meetings
of the American Sociological Association, New York, 1980

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Abstract

Enrollment declines, shifting academic interests among students, and shrinking revenues is the emerging reality of American higher education. What was a concern for reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic a few years ago has become a concern for recession, retrenchment and response. What is happening in sociology? How, if at all, are sociologists responding to this new reality? Based on a survey of a random sample of sociology departments (N = 402), this paper describes and analyzes the responses of sociology departments across the country in terms of two basic questions. First, how have these problems, as they affect sociology, been defined and approached? Second, what strategies are being employed to confront and cope with this new reality?

COPING WITH VOCATIONALISM:

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Retrenchment may well be the burning issue of the 80s for many if not most colleges and universities. However, with much less fanfare, retrenchment had already become an issue for most liberal arts disciplines by the middle of the 70s. In sociology for example, the number of bachelors' degrees awarded peaked at 36,000 in 1973; by 1979 the number of degrees awarded had declined by almost 40% to 22,000 (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 1980). In the 70s, despite continued high total college and university enrollments, enrollments within colleges and universities shifted in massive proportions from the liberal arts to such vocational programs as engineering, social welfare, health services, business administration, and criminal justice. The survey of sociology departments and programs reported upon in this paper was designed to answer a number of questions raised by this enrollment shift.

First of all, how (if at all) have sociology departments responded to this shift? Have they sought to compete with the "enemy" by playing the enemy's own game - that is, by vocationalizing courses, creating or merging with new programs in social welfare, criminal justice, health services, etc.? Have departments sought to attract students by reducing the standards of work demanded in courses or by adopting innovative teaching methods? Have departments avoided all of th foregoing in favor of maintaining a rigorous

academic program while supplementing that program with internships, career advising, and other devices designed to address the career concerns of students?

Secondly, which departments have adopted which kinds of responses? Are departments located in colleges or universities where enrollments in vocational fields have risen more likely to respond than departments located in colleges or universities where enrollments in vocational fields have remained unchanged or have declined? Do graduate departments of sociology respond differently than departments in four year or two year institutions? Do departments located in colleges or universities with selective admissions standards respond differently than departments in colleges or universities with less or non-selective admissions standards?

Finally, our survey cannot by itself now be used to determine the impact of various types of responses on such things as enrollments. However, in conjunction with later surveys, ours can provide the basis for longitudinal impact studies.[1]

Methods

There are almost 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 1980). For our purposes we focused on those 1,888 colleges and universities which offer one or more courses in sociology and whose sociology programs were listed in the American Sociological Association's 1979 Directory of Departments of Sociology. This Directory, it should be noted, lists sociology programs for just 569 of some 1,700 two-year institutions. From the universe of 1,888 programs in the Directory we drew a stratified random sample defined as

follows: approximately one third (n = 100) of all graduate departments; all departments (n = 42) within those private four year liberal arts colleges having the highest admissions standards; approximately one eighth (n = 122) of the departments in all other four year colleges and universities; approximately one fourth (n = 138) of all two year colleges.[2] In short, survey questionnaires were addressed to 402 persons listed as chairs of sociology departments, social science divisions, or social studies programs.

This paper is being written just over a month after the first wave of surveys were mailed and shortly after the first follow-up letters are sent. We therefore have no idea of what the final return rate will be. So far the return rate is slightly over 50%. We believe these returns are representative since the return rates vary only slightly (47% - 52%) between subcategories within each of the following four ways of categorizing the sample: highest sociology degree offered; geographic region; undergraduate admissions selectivity; number of sociology faculty in the department.

The three page survey instrument was purposefully designed to be as brief as possible in order to maximize the return rate. For the same reason questions were designed so that they could be answered quickly. Inevitably, of course, such a strategy makes the interpretation of answers to those questions more difficult. For example, we asked chairpersons to check "yes" or "no" to the question "Has the sociology faculty in your department, division, or program sought to give greater emphasis to application, thus making your undergraduate courses more immediately relevant to employment?" Obviously we cannot ascertain from a "yes" answer the extent to which that answer applies to all faculty, a majority, or only a few. Nor can we be certain whether a "yes"

means trivializing the content of courses or "assisting students to comprehend the sociological perspective and to apply a sociological stance as an eminently applicable and practical tool for career entry and career pursuit" (Mauksch, 1980:10).

Other information solicited from chairpersons included: their opinions on the extent to which undergraduate students had become more vocationally oriented; their opinions on whether undergraduate students were as well prepared academically as were students of a decade ago; their estimates of enrollment changes within their departments during the first five and last five years of the 1970s; their estimates of the enrollment experiences of other disciplines and fields within their college or university; the required and elective courses dropped and added from the undergraduate curriculum during the last five years; whether or not the sociology faculty had changed the standards of work demanded of undergraduate students; whether or not the sociology faculty had collectively adopted new methods for teaching introductory sociology or other courses; whether or not the sociology faculty had adopted any or all of ten possible supplements to the curriculum (for example, a handbook, an internship program, a career information resource room, etc.).

Other information about departments was obtained from the ASA's Directory: geographic region; highest degree awarded in sociology; number of sociology faculty; number of sociology majors; whether or not sociology was combined with another discipline (e.g., anthropology) in a joint department and whether or not sociology was part of a multidisciplinary social studies division. Information about colleges and universities was obtained from standard sources (Hunter, 1979; Barron's Profiles, 1979; Cass and Birnbaum, 1979):

control (private vs. public); religious affiliation, if any; number of faculty; number of students; admissions selectivity; highest degree awarded; and location (urban, suburban, rural). Finally each state was characterized by the projected percentage change in the size of high school graduating classes between 1979 and 1995 (The Chronicle, 1980).

[Insert Table I about here]

Results

Table I summarizes the changes in enrollment and student characteristics that sociology programs have experienced during the past decade. Though some 60% of all department chairs report that students are more poorly prepared, there are substantial albeit predictable differences between types of institutions in these perceptions. Especially noteworthy is the almost perfect consensus that students have become more vocationally oriented. At the same time, the translation of those vocational orientations into enrollment shifts has not taken place uniformally. For example, though the majority of the sociology departments within "elite" private liberal arts colleges report their students have become more vocationally oriented, very few of these departments report a shift of enrollments into engineering, business, health and welfare services, or other professional, technical, and managerial fields of study which, in any case, seldom exist at such colleges. Nor do these colleges show any propensity to develop such vocational programs; as one chairperson put it: "Our college is continuing a rather strict adherence to the liberal arts. A multidepartmental program in human services was turned down by the college administration." A rather different situation exists for departments in other types of institutions where undergraduate students may readily enter

TABLE I CHANGES IN ENROLLMENTS AND STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS, BY HIGHEST DEGREE OFFERED BY THE DEPARTMENT

Changes:	Four-Year Institutions				Two-Year Institutions	TOTAL
	Ph.D.	Masters	All Four-Year	Elite Private Liberal Arts Colleges Only		
Undergraduate students far more or somewhat more vocationally oriented	100.0%	100.0%	85.1%	100.0%	91.2%	89.1%
Undergraduate students far more or somewhat more poorly prepared academically for college	33.3	50.7	62.0	11.9	65.9	60.4
Undergraduate sociology enrollments between 1970-71 and 1974-75:						
Up some or up sharply	46.5	50.7	40.7	45.2	62.6	48.5
Unchanged	12.4	22.9	23.3	23.8	25.1	23.1
Down some or down sharply	41.1	18.8	26.5	23.8	5.3	20.5
Unknown	0.0	7.6	9.5	7.1	7.0	7.9
Undergraduate sociology enrollments between 1975-76 and 1979-80:						
Up some or up sharply	16.3	18.8	40.1	28.6	30.2	33.9
Unchanged	24.8	19.4	26.9	35.7	25.1	25.6
Down some or down sharply	58.9	61.8	31.4	31.0	35.7	36.9
Unknown	0.0	0.0	1.6	4.7	9.0	3.6
College/University enrollments:						
Liberal arts disciplines down, professional, technical, and managerial fields up	62.8	54.9	29.9	0.0	30.4	34.2
Other combinations or patterns of enrollment change	37.2	45.1	70.1	100.0	69.6	65.8

or transfer into a variety of vocational programs. To the extent enrollment in these vocational programs is increasing relative to enrollments in liberal arts disciplines, sociology and other liberal arts disciplines must face considerable pressure to vocationalize their curriculums or to respond in some other innovative way to declining enrollments. Yet our own biases, not to mention the results of prior research on innovation in education (Carlson, 1965; Corwin, 1973; Evans, 1968; Stern, et al, 1976) had led us to expect relatively little innovation on the part of sociology departments. The results of Table II were therefore a surprise to us for a considerable amount of innovation has taken place.

As we noted in discussing methods, the survey questionnaire provided information on two general types of innovation, those which involve vocationalizing the curriculum in one way or another and those supplements which could be added to an essentially academic curriculum without necessarily vocationalizing it. Among the former innovations are: (1) the addition of new courses in social work, criminal justice, applied sociology, social issues and problems; (2) the hiring of faculty to teach such courses; (3) the effort to make course content more immediately and directly "relevant" to employment. Possible supplements include: a handbook or career information packet for prospective students; a career information center or resource room; career paths or tracks (combinations of major, minor, and elective courses specifically tailored for students with differing career objectives); the combining of career advising with academic counseling; a course in which students learn about job interviewing, resume writing, selection of graduate programs, career planning; an internship program; the use of alumni/ae to inform current students of career possibilities; the establishment of relations with secondary

schools; taking over the task of placing students in jobs; surveying graduates concerning their careers. Two other possible innovations were reducing the standards of work demanded of students and collectively adopting new teaching methods.

[Insert Table II about here]

The addition of vocationally oriented courses and faculty is most evident in those departments granting the masters and in those departments located in non-elite four year institutions. As we have seen in examining the results of Table I, these results are not unexpected, for these types of institutions are the most likely to have experienced declining enrollments in liberal arts and rising enrollments in vocational fields - i.e., intense pressure to vocationalize their own programs. As the chair of one masters degree granting department remarked "We are just beginning to work on these areas [curriculum revisions, adding supplements]; until this year we were in relatively good shape and didn't 'need to' make drastic changes." But Ph.D. granting departments and departments in two year institutions appear from Table I to be under as much if not more pressure to change. Why haven't they?

We suspect that the typical department in a two year institution doesn't have the resources to add new vocational courses or faculty; indeed, their mandate is to be a "service" department, providing survey courses as part of a general program in social studies. Only when outside funds are provided can new courses or faculty be added and if these funds are withdrawn the effects can be devastating. One chair of a social studies department noted just such consequences: "LEAA funding dried up for criminal justice majors, hence lower social studies enrollments." Two other possibilities are open to two year institutions:

TABLE II RESPONSES TO CHANGE, BY HIGHEST SOCIOLOGY DEGREE OFFERED

Responses:	Ph.D.	Masters	Four-Year Institutions: All Four-Year	Four-Year Institutions: Elite Private Liberal Arts Colleges Only	Two-Year Institutions	Total - All Institutions
Added four or more vocational courses to the undergraduate curriculum OR created or merged with one or more vocational programs +	16.3%	27.8%	22.3%	16.7%	10.7%	18.4%
Recruited faculty having one or more vocational specialties +	24.0	54.9	36.2	4.8	8.8	28.5
Sought to give greater emphasis to application, thus making undergraduate courses more immediately relevant to employment	50.4	63.9	59.4	26.2	64.1	60.5
Reduced the standards of work demanded of undergraduate students	8.5	9.7	30.1	4.8	35.7	28.8
Faculty collectively introduced or adopted new methods of teaching the introductory course or other courses	38.0	14.6	31.2	28.6	32.2	30.7
Added four or more supplements to the undergraduate curriculum ≠	24.8	50.7	53.4	26.2	25.1	42.7
Combination of responses: Added one or more supplements to the curriculum, added no more than two vocational courses, but made no other responses	16.3	14.6	13.4	33.3	12.5	13.4

+ Vocational courses and specialties include the following: (1) Applied Sociology (incl. policy, planning, evaluation); (2) Social Issues and Problems (incl. drug abuse, prostitution, mental illness); (3) Social Welfare (incl. counseling, group work); (4) Criminology (incl. probation, parole, corrections, patrol, reporting, investigations). Vocational courses and specialties are here distinguished from such academic specialties and courses as theory, methods, social organization, sociology of knowledge, demography, ecology, deviance and control, stratification, conflict, etc.

≠ The ten possible supplements are: a handbook or career information packet; a career information or resource room; career paths or tracks; combined career advising with academic counseling; a course dealing with career planning, resumes, job interviewing, etc.; an internship program; inviting alumni/ae back to discuss careers with present students; establishment of relations with secondary schools; taken over task of placing graduates in jobs; surveyed graduates in jobs; surveyed graduates concerning their careers.

dropping existing courses in order to add new ones, or drastically revising existing ones. These possibilities are implied in the following quote from the chair of a department in a community college which has recently revamped its curriculum: "Introduced human sexuality as an interdisciplinary course in sociology and humanities. Fantastic enrollments."

With respect to Ph.D. granting departments, we suspect that although they may have the resources to add new vocational courses or faculty they feel no need to do so; their mandate to engage in research insulates them from all but the most extreme changes in undergraduate enrollments. This indifference to enrollment fluctuations was expressed well by the chair of a Midwestern department: "We have done little to react to this change in enrollment except continue to have a major with high quality teaching. Enrollments come and go - now they are gone - surely they will return."

With the exception of the "elite" private liberal arts colleges, the majority of departments reported making courses more "relevant" - an innovation open to even the most resource poor departments. However, this sort of response was most likely to occur within two year institutions. Two year institutions, together with departments in non-elite four year institutions, were also the most likely to reduce the standards of work demanded of undergraduate students. In interpreting this finding, it should be recalled that it is these same institutions which are most likely to have reported that their present students are more poorly prepared than those of ten years ago.

Table II further reveals that, with the exception of masters degree granting departments, the faculties in about one third of the departments in other types of institutions have collectively adopted new methods of teaching. On the other hand, masters degree granting departments and departments in non-elite

four year institutions are most likely to have added four or more supplements to their curriculums. We were especially interested in the last row of figures in Table II, for this concerns the type of response we have elsewhere advocated departments adopting (Green, Klug, Neider, Salem, 1980). This type of response involves adding supplements designed to give undergraduates a greater capacity for career planning and job searching but avoiding other changes in order to maintain the integrity of a rigorous liberal arts oriented curriculum. Meeting the latter criterion requires that departments add no more than two vocational courses, add no faculty with vocational specialties, not make courses easier or more "relevant," and not even collectively adopt new teaching methods (though individual faculty may do so). Note from Table II that only 13.4% of all departments chose this response. The response was most likely to occur among "elite" private liberal arts colleges, but even among these just one third adopted it. The reluctance of these departments to adopt any other sort of innovation was summed up well by a chairperson in a New York college: "No substitute for good teaching and good sociology - all the rest can be fluff and usually does not work."

In summary, the types of innovations that departments adopt appear to vary considerably depending upon the type of degree awarded by that department. This apparent linkage between type of degree awarded and type of response adopted may be spurious, however, for type of degree awarded and undergraduate admissions selectivity are associated. As we have already noted, type of degree awarded is also associated with pressure to vocationalize the curriculum - i.e., with the extent to which enrollments in liberal arts are declining while increasing in vocational fields. Could it be that the type of response adopted is more closely associated with admissions

selectivity and with pressure to vocationalize than with type of degree awarded? To examine these hypotheses, responses to change were cross-tabulated with both admissions selectivity and pressure to vocationalize. The cross-tabulations are presented in Table III.[3]

[Insert Table III about here]

As expected, making courses more relevant is an innovation that becomes more likely as the pressure to vocationalize increases and admissions selectivity decreases. Reducing the standards of work demanded does not appear to vary much with pressure to vocationalize but does vary closely with admissions selectivity. Collective adoption of new teaching methods, on the other hand, does not appear to be affected by either admissions selectivity or pressure to vocationalize. With respect to the addition of supplements, there is some tendency for such additions to increase with both selectivity and pressure to vocationalize. The response we have advocated, adding supplements with a minimum of either vocationalization of courses or reduction of standards, increases in likelihood with admissions selectivity and <u>decreases</u> in likelihood with pressure to vocationalize. Thus the response we have advocated is least likely to occur in the departments most like our own!

So far the findings were pretty much as we had expected them to be. But Table III does contain some surprises. Note that the greater the pressure to vocationalize the curriculum, the greater the likelihood of a department adding four or more vocational courses and recruiting faculty having one or more vocational specialties. We expected such a result. But these responses are <u>more</u> rather than <u>less</u> typical of departments located in colleges and universities where admissions are <u>selective</u>. We believe that the latter

TABLE III RESPONSES TO CHANGE, BY UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS SELECTIVITY AND BY PRESSURE TO VOCATIONALIZE THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

	Pressure to Vocationalize:*					
	High		Moderate		Low	
	Admissions Selective	Admissions Less Selective	Admissions Selective	Admissions Less Selective	Admissions Selective	Admissions Less Selective
Added four or more vocational courses to the undergraduate curriculum OR created or merged with one or more vocational programs +	30.0%	20.4%	17.4%	12.0%	23.9%	9.9%
Recruited faculty having one or more vocational specialties +	21.8	25.7	35.3	24.4	32.2	32.5
Sought to give greater emphasis to application, thus making undergraduate courses more immediately relevant to employment	71.7	84.1	50.5	53.2	34.9	62.7
Reduced the standards of work demanded of undergraduate students	16.0	30.1	14.2	51.5	23.9	31.8
Faculty collectively introduced or adopted new methods of teaching the introductory course or other courses	22.5	25.1	33.0	48.2	21.3	34.2
Added four or more supplements to the undergraduate curriculum ≠	73.3	41.9	37.6	39.8	41.5	33.5
Combination of responses: Added one or more supplements to the curriculum, added no more than two vocational courses, but made no other responses	10.4	3.0	25.7	6.7	25.9	13.4

* Pressure to vocationalize the curriculum is defined as follows: (1) high if enrollments in liberal arts disciplines are down while enrollments in professional, technical, and managerial fieds are up; (2) moderate if (a) enrollments in liberal arts disciplines are unchanged while enrollments in professional, technical, and managerial fields are up, or (b) enrollments in liberal arts disciplines are down while enrollments in professional, technical and managerial fields are unchanged; (3) low if (a) other enrollment patterns prevail, or (b) enrollpatterns were not ascertained, or (c) no professional, technical, or managerial programs exist at the institution.

+ Vocational courses and specialties are defined in the first footnote to Table II

≠ The ten possible supplements are described in the second footnote to Table II

result may reflect the fact that the vast majority of less selective colleges and universities are two year institutions which simply do not have the resources to add more courses or faculty. Thus it is likely that the variance in several types of response is a function of all three independent variables we have examined (type of degree awarded, admissions selectivity, pressure to vocationalize) and perhaps of other variables as well. Multiple regression analyses after the returns are more complete should help answer such questions.

Discussion

Others' research (Hunter, 1979; Bates and Reid, 1971; Gates, 1969; Shin, 1975; Hansen, et al, 1976; Sherman, 1978) had led us to expect to find at least a few sociology departments selling their souls to the devil of vocationalism and careerism. We are nonetheless surprised by our survey's revelations of the extent to which this is happening. Even more disquieting is the aura of defeatism we detected in sessions on retrenchment held at several annual meetings of regional sociological societies this spring.

We feel there is no need for either soul selling or defeatism. Not surprisingly, our optimism is rooted in our own experience. First of all, our enrollments have been increasing at the rate of about 10% per year for five years, despite the splitting off of anthropology and social welfare into separate programs, and despite the phenomenal growth of our College of Economics and Business. Secondly, with just 7.5 FTE faculty we taught over 2,500 students this year, including over 80 majors and 30 minors in sociology. More importantly, we have not added any vocational courses nor recruited any faculty with vocational specialties. We have not reduced the standards of work demanded of students nor sought to make our courses more

directly and immediately relevant to employment. Rather, we have retained a rigorous and intellectually demanding curriculum and sought to teach sociology as a humanistic, liberating discipline. We have however assumed a great deal of responsibility for coping with the career concerns and vocationalism of our students and to do so have supplemented our curriculum in a number of ways (cf. Green, Klug, Neider, Salem, 1980). Thus we were pleased to learn that at least a few departments had chosen a coping strategy similar to our own. But we hope more will do so. Even if further research reveals that the impact of this strategy on our enrollments is unique to us or is merely temporary, we feel that the ethical case for such a strategy is compelling.

NOTES

1. Bradshaw and McPherron (1980; 6-21) have also conducted a survey of curricular changes in sociology departments. However the focus of their study is quite different from our own.
2. These "elite" private liberal arts colleges meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) classified as "most" or "highly" competitive by Barron's Profiles (1979); (b) 50% or more of the entering freshmen have SAT verbal or SAT quantitative scores over 600; (c) 50% or more of the entering freshmen have composite ACT scores of 25 or more. The source of data for criteria (a) and (b) was Peterson's Annual Guide (Hunter, 1979).
3. Colleges and universities were classified as "selective" if they had been classified in Barron's Profiles (1979) "most competitive," "highly competitive," "very competitive," or "competitive"; "less selective" institutions were those defined by Barron's as "less competitive" or "non-competitive."

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